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# Celestial Sips

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One to two cups daily  
of herbal teas are safe  
typically.



## Celestial Sips

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

Some teas have  
therapeutic value.

In many cultures of the world, there is long tradition of tea-drinking. The leaves of *Camellia sinensis* are processed to produce either black or green tea. But many other teas are popular because of their fragrance or therapeutic value, such as enhancing relaxation or improving your digestion.

A herbal tea, or tisane, refers to any non-caffeinated beverage made from the infusion of dried flowers, fruit, leaves, bark, seeds or roots in boiling water. The tea may be sweetened and can be served either hot or cold. Many herbal teas are available as pure or blended samples.

Hibiscus is a common ingredient in many herbal teas. It gives the beverage a fruity, tart taste and a red color. Scientists at Tufts University have shown that three cups a day of herbal tea containing hibiscus can help lower high blood pressure in pre-hypertensive and mildly-hypertensive adults as effectively as some medications. Systolic blood pressure dropped an average of seven points, and diastolic blood pressure an average of three points during a six-week period. Those with the highest initial blood pressures experienced double the average drops.

Ginger is used in herbal teas to provide a spicy or zesty flavor. Ginger is used as an alternative to antihistamines to prevent and treat nausea, vomiting and dizziness caused by motion sickness. The rhizome of ginger is also used as an antiemetic for postoperative nausea. Compounds in fresh ginger also provide it with the ability to lower the risk of blood clots. The gingerols and curcumin in ginger have anti-inflammatory and cancer-protective properties.

Chamomile, one of the most widely-used herbal ingredients, helps improve gastrointestinal function. It relieves indigestion and flatulence. Its flavonoid content provides anti-spasmodic and anti-inflammatory effects. People



allergic to ragweed, asters and chrysanthemums should avoid teas containing chamomile.

The fruity, mild-flavor of Rooibos tea, along with its high antioxidant polyphenolics content, makes it a very popular ingredient in various

herbal tea blends. Due to its low level of tan-

nins, Rooibos lacks the bitter astringent taste experienced with many other teas, and does not impair iron absorption as observed with many other beverages. Due to its antispasmodic properties, Rooibos is used for digestive upsets and intestinal spasms. Animal studies have shown that Rooibos has cancer-protective action as well.

Valerian root is used widely as a sleep aid and mild sedative without adverse effects on REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. It is effective singly or when combined with other herbs, such as passionflower, lemon balm and hops. A number of clinical studies have shown the effectiveness of valerian for the treatment of insomnia, anxiety and sleep disorders, without producing morning sleepiness.

Only prepackaged teas should be used and not loose, unpackaged teas. While most herbal teas are safe, some are poorly tolerated by pregnant women. No more than one to three cups a day of any tea should be drunk by anyone on a regular basis. Self-medication using a herbal tea for a serious medical condition should not substitute for competent medical advice.

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